

4 Simple Steps To Effective Communication



by Iain Smith

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Are You Getting Your Message Across?



We'd all like to be better communicators but sadly too many people still struggle to get their message across in a clear and coherent manner.

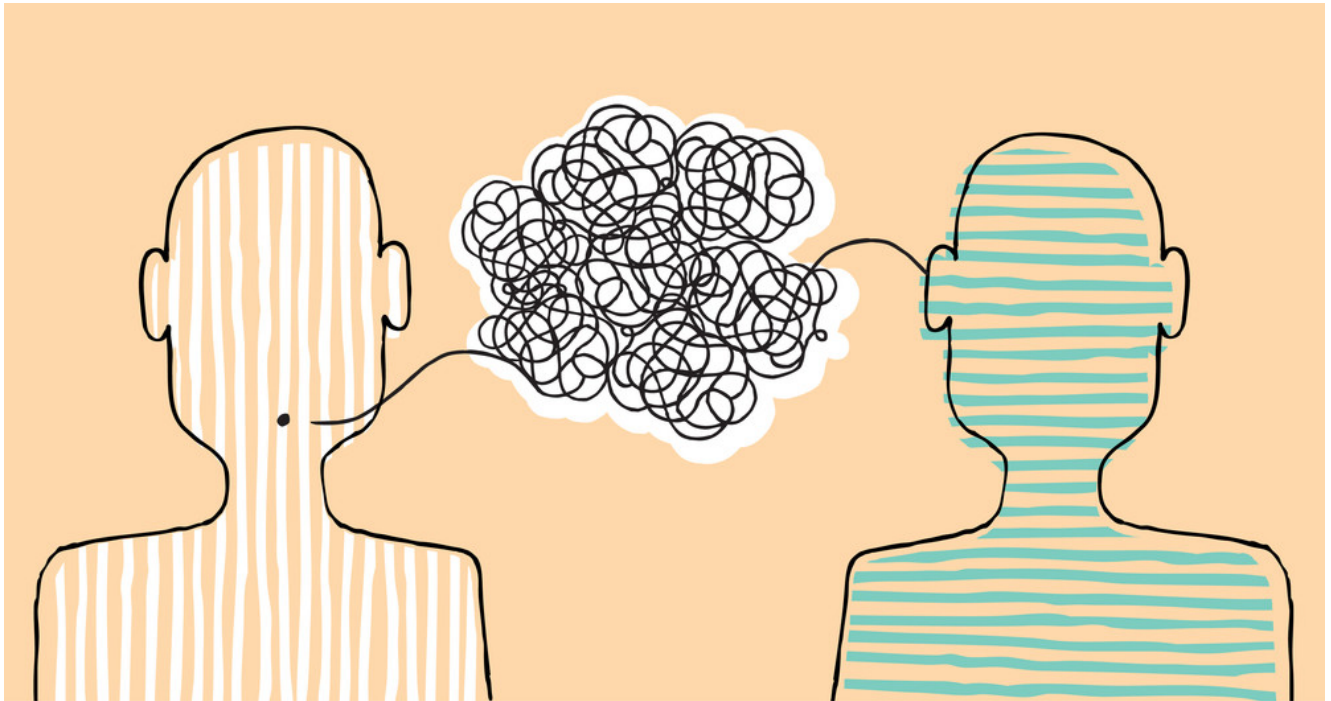
In a fast-moving, time-poor environment like a school, having excellent communication skills is vital.

The ability to communicate your ideas and instructions precisely and with ease, will hold you in good stead throughout your career.

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Employing a simple communication process called the **MADE Model** is a simple way for you to be instantly understood.

Using this model will help you to stand out from the crowd as a consistently great communicator.



The Problem

You'll have been in the situation when someone starts talking to you and they haven't properly introduced what it is they are talking about.

It's not clear whether they are:

- requesting your time or knowledge
- giving you a task
- sharing vital information
- just shooting the breeze

All of a sudden you find yourself in the middle of a conversation and you have no idea how it started, where it came from or even what it's about!

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All you know is that you are listening to lots of information, but you're not sure why!

Your brain is working frantically, darting back and forth, trying to fathom out the relevance of this stuff you're being told.

A Conversation

The model I'm going to give you ensures that you will always be able to communicate clearly. To illustrate the need for this model let me share a conversation I experienced.

It was a conversation that was time-consuming, confusing and ultimately pointless.

Yet it could have so easily been a fruitful conversation.

If the MADE model had been used.

I was an English teacher in a busy secondary school and was dashing along a corridor between lessons.

I needed to get to a classroom so that I could cover another teacher's lesson.

Amidst the busy flow of students, a different colleague, moving in the opposite direction, stopped me and began to talk at a furious pace.

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THEM: "Hi, Iain! I'm so pleased I bumped into you! Have you got my mobile number? The thing is the Year 10 pupils love the whole camping and trekking thing so much. Oh, and it's an early morning ferry, I know, but the whole weekend is such good fun. You'll love it. Everyone gets so much out of it. You will too. D of E is a very special thing that our school does so well. McGuffy normally runs the Sunday section and there's a huge breakfast at the port. Here's my mobile number . . ."

ME: (Thinking) What does he want?

THEM: ". . . blah, blah, blah."

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Guessing Games

By now I was able to make an educated guess at what they wanted from me but I still didn't have *clarity* on the situation.

I'd taken in a large amount of detail in a few short seconds yet I certainly wasn't able to make any decisions.

Meanwhile, the full-flowing chaos of the corridor was rapidly slowing to a trickle of students and I was still far away from the classroom I needed to reach.

My colleague continued.

THEM: " . . . so I was wondering would you be able to join our Duke of Edinburgh group this weekend? Mr. McGuffy has dropped out at the last minute and we desperately need someone that can come."

Aha! Now I knew what they wanted.

This was the vital piece of information I could have done with at the start of the conversation.

A Fork In The Road

They had finally offered up the key information that would allow me to make a decision.

At this point in a discussion, there are usually two paths to go down.

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Path One:

In this first scenario, I eventually learned that my colleague needs a favour and would like me to spend my weekend on a school trip.

I'd have been happy to help but the situation is that I already have plans for that weekend, so have to decline.

The upshot is that, because of the confusing way I was asked, we have both wasted time in the corridor, we are both now late for our lessons.

In all honesty, I'm more than a little frustrated that I've been hijacked and bamboozled like this to no eventual purpose.

This happens more often than we would like.

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Path Two:

In this second scenario I have learned the same information from my colleague, that they want a favour, but this in this parallel universe I am free at the weekend and would be willing to step in. Hurrah!

Does that now mean the information was communicated in a good way?

No! Not at all.

Although I now know what they want from me and that I can do it, I still need to re-hear all the information they gave to me in the first place, because now it will make sense.

I can listen to it within a context that makes sense, in a way that it couldn't possibly the first time around.

This sort of conversation goes on in organisations and the fallout can be very frustrating.

These conversations cost time, test patience and can easily cause frustration and resentment.

So let's get down to the simple model I promised you and see how easily these communication problems can be prevented.

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You've Got It Made

There's a very simple communication model that helps to avoid problems like this.

It saves time and creates clarity around discussions, expectations and events.

It's called the **MADE Model** and looks like this:

M = Message

A = Action

D = Detail

E = Evidence

Model Messenger

In the example above where my colleague gives me lots of disjointed information first, they've started on the 'D' in the model.

D is the . . .

Detail

Starting with the D is a common thing for people to do.

The problem is that I'm receiving information but I don't yet know what to do with it.

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People are often worried that they'll sound rude or forceful if they come straight out with what they want, and so they will try and sugarcoat a request.

They'll soften the 'ask' by cloaking it in conversational detail yet not realise that at this stage of the process this is out of place

Starting with detail dilutes and confuses the request for the listener.

When people start communicating by giving lots of detail it is difficult for the listener to understand which element of information is important.

This is almost always confusing and can easily lead to frustration and mistakes.

Get The Message



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In these situations, it is much better to start the conversation with 'M', the **Message**.

*M – **Message** – tell them what the message is.*

The message should be direct and straightforward.

For my colleague in the corridor, it could be as simple as them saying to me:

THEM: "Hi I'm so glad I bumped into you. I need to ask a favour."

At this stage, I would know that they want something from me. I can prepare my mind to receive a request. This simple **message** helps me to get ready for a clear 'ask'.

Action Man

Now I'm primed to be told what their request is. I'm ready to know what they want me to do. I'm ready to hear how they want me to act.

*A – **Action** – tell them what you want them to do*



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THEM: “Would you be able to join our DofE trekking group this weekend?”

That simple question is clear and direct. I’m now in no doubt about what is being asked of me. I know what the request is.

I should point out that we’re not being salespeople during this conversation. We’re not trying to *‘sell the sizzle’*.

What we’re trying to achieve is to have clear, explicit and mature conversations.

We’re trying to transfer information as clearly and effectively as possible.

So here I am and I’ve been asked if I’ll help the school trip at the weekend.

A Fork Revisited

Let’s go to those two paths again.



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Path One

This is the situation where I can't go on the school trip because I've got plans for the weekend. In this scenario I can simply say:

ME: "So sorry, I can't help you. I've already got plans for the weekend. Thanks for asking and good luck finding someone."

Both of us has absolute clarity about the situation and, crucially, neither of us has wasted any time or become confused by a flurry of useless information.

We can both move on.

Notice that, as well as me not having had my time hijacked, my colleague has not wasted their time either.

Path Two

We're both in the busy corridor and because of the MADE model I know what I'm being asked and when I'm needed. Hey, I am actually free, so at this stage, I mention that I could do it. Hurrah again!

Of course, my mind now moves on to prepare for the other things I would need to know about the trip. Because we've communicated using the **MADE Model** I'm ready and primed for the **Detail**.

*D – **Detail** – give them any relevant information*

Devil Is In The Detail

We're both clear about what's being asked because of that, we're both in a better position than before.

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We could continue the conversation in the corridor or perhaps we could arrange to catch up later at lunch, or the end of the day.

Without the confusion from the original back to front conversation, we're able to think more clearly.

ME: "I'm free this weekend so I might be able to help. Shall we meet at lunch and you can fill me in a bit more?"

Isn't that much more empowering for both parties?

Then, when we meet they can give me all of the relevant detail. That part of the conversation might go something like this:

THEM: "We've had a last minute drop out and need a teacher like you so that the trip can go ahead. It's an early start. The coach leaves from school at 6am so we can catch the ferry. Big old breakfast when we get to the other side, then trekking boots on and we're away. It's a great weekend and means so much to the Year 10s. You'd be a star if you could help us out. Back home by 10pm on the Sunday."

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Now, and only now, does the **detail** become useful and relevant. Bring on the D!

Before the M and the A all of that information was just going to be confusing.

That's why **detail** should never be at the start of a conversation.

Now, and I'll say it again, only now, do I actually need the detail.

At this point, it makes sense and is actually vital to making sure I can carry out the **action** that followed the **message**

E's Are Good

The last piece of the jigsaw is the 'E', the **Evidence**.

*E – **Evidence** – some extra information that completes the picture.*



Often it is back-up for the **detail** .

In the conversation I had with my colleague the E could simply look like this:

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THEM: “That’s great. Thanks so much. Here’s the 500-page Health & Safety form that you’ll need to complete in triplicate, your ferry ticket and you’ll need to bring your passport too. Here’s my mobile number.”

Evidence can be a ticket, an invoice or a timetable. It could be an email attachment, a pair of boots or a business card.

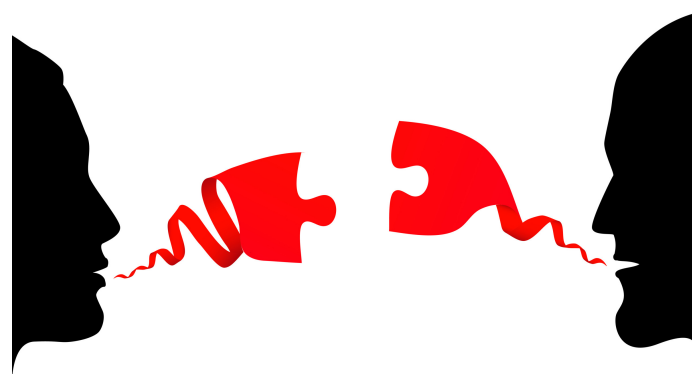
Many times you might not need to go any further than **detail** but often there will be something extra to add and that is your **evidence**.

Recap

Let’s go over those four steps of the **MADE Model** again.

In order they are:

1. M – **Message** – tell them what the message is
2. A – **Action** – tell them what you want them to do
3. D – **Detail** – give them any relevant information
4. E – **Evidence** – give them any evidence they might need



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I encourage people to use the MADE model in as many situations as possible.

It is ideal for:

- Issuing instructions
- Delivering colleague appraisals
- Drafting a letter
- Calling a parent with bad news (or good news!)
- Asking for help
- Praising a student
- Writing an email

Remember: Use MADE And You've Got It Made!

Anywhere and everywhere you want to get information across clearly, effectively and with a minimum of time being used, MADE is an elegant, easy to use and effective model of communication.

